TESTIMONY OF

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BEFORE THE
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COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Meek, and members of the Subcommittee. I

appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today on behalf of the men and

women of ATF and ATF's National Canine Training and Operations Support

Branch.

By way of background, ATF has been training canines since 1984, dating from our

relationship with the Connecticut State Police and the training of the first accelerant

detection canine, "Nellie." Since 1995, ATF has trained 36 classes of explosives

detection canines at our National Canine Training Center in Front Royal, Virginia.

Currently, we have deployed over 500 explosives detection canines worldwide with

State, local, Federal, and foreign law enforcement agencies. We have trained

explosives detection canines for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Internal

Revenue Service, the U.S. Marshals Service, the Federal Emergency Management

Agency, other government agencies, and 16 foreign countries through the State

Department's Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program. Training canines for other

Federal, State, local and foreign law enforcement agencies is a major component of

our mission, which in turn supports our Strategic Goals of protecting the public and reducing violent crime.

ATF's explosives detection canines training methodology was developed and is overseen by ATF's forensic chemists and our nationally accredited explosives lab. The testing of the methodology has been independently validated by the Department of Energy's Oak Ridge National Laboratories. It is estimated that there are more than 19,000 known explosives compositions worldwide. This number makes it impossible to train a canine on all these compositions individually. However, the vast majority of explosives are composed of a relatively small number of explosive chemicals or ingredients. Because of this, ATF trains on five basic families of explosive chemicals, enabling ATF explosives detection canines to detect a very wide range of explosives formulations. This ensures that the canines can detect explosives compounds to which they have never previously been exposed. For example, in the case of water gel or emulsion type explosives, whether the explosive is Tovex®, Austin Emulex, or any of several thousand commercial blasting or improvised explosive ANFO mixtures of this type, the one common ingredient is ammonium nitrate. Rather than concentrate just on individual brands, which may contain proprietary formulas, by training the canine to detect ammonium nitrate, we can, in effect, cover the whole family of products which might contain ammonium nitrate. In fact, during the final certification, the canines are tested on some explosive materials they have not seen in training. Moreover, ATF systematically trains canines on peroxide explosives, which have been used in several terrorist attacks.

To ensure the canine's continued high level of performance, ATF hosts a mandatory annual recertification/training seminar for each U.S.-based ATF-trained canine team (handler and canine). During this recertification, the team's proficiency is tested and the handler's extensive training log for the previous year is reviewed. The canine teams are also continually evaluated for their operational proficiency by ATF during in-service training sessions.

While other breeds of canines may possess the temperament and qualities for explosive detection, ATF only uses the Labrador retriever. We have found that they are a hearty, intelligent breed that is readily adaptable to changing environments and they possess a gentle disposition which allows for multiple teams to work in close proximity to each other. This allows for teams to work in crowds and around children, for example, which we find to be highly complementary to ATF's diverse and worldwide mission.

ATF obtains its canines from guide dog foundations. Volunteers called "puppy raisers" keep the canines in their homes from 8 weeks to 14 months of age. These families give their time and love to the puppies so they can be properly socialized and acclimated to the family environment. The families housebreak the canines, expose them to real world environments, and ensure that they receive all their vaccinations. Occasionally, however, a canine does not meet the requirements of a guide dog. Undesirable traits in a guide dog, such as curiosity and eagerness, are

precisely the qualities that ATF seeks for an explosives detection canine. The guide dog organization then notifies ATF, and ATF trainers examine the canine to identify its potential as an explosives detection canine. The excellent quality of canines procured and the training methodology ATF uses have resulted in a proven track record of a 7- to 9- year working life of the canine. Throughout the canine's working career and beyond in retirement, the canine resides in the handler's home as a trusted partner and family member.

The ATF Canine Training Facility and Kennel are located in Front Royal, Virginia, on the grounds of the 250-acre U.S. Customs and Border Protection Canine Training Facility. The 14,000-square-foot training building allows for climate controlled, year-round training. The state-of-the art kennel can accommodate 100 canines and incorporates the latest technology in kennel design. ATF's canine training program trains both explosives detection and accelerant detection canines. In addition to the basic canine and handler training programs that occur throughout the year, this facility is used as the site of annual recertification training for all ATF-trained canines operating domestically. This facility also provides an appropriate location for the continuing development and enhancement of testing, operational and tactical protocols for our canine teams.

This year, ATF will train approximately 26 foreign explosives detection canines for the State Department's Anti-Terrorism Assistance program and 34 such teams for Federal, State, and local law enforcement agencies. The student handler classes are

mixed to foster greater relationships and collaboration among domestic and foreign law enforcement agencies. Domestically, ATF evaluates applicant State and local agencies to ensure that they have the need for and the means to physically support a canine/handler team when selecting students for the program. Federal, State, and local law enforcement trainees attend training and receive a canine at no charge to their agency. Foreign law enforcement agencies receive canines through a reimbursable agreement between ATF and the State Department's Anti-Terrorism Assistance program. Critical in this arrangement is the agreement made between ATF and the student's agency that the agency receiving the training will assist ATF with investigations, when called upon, for a period of 5 years. In fact, foreign ATF-trained canine/handler teams responded to assist with security for the 2002 Salt Lake City and 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, as well as Olympics held in other countries.

While a number of Federal agencies utilize explosives detection canines, each is unique to its own particular missions, such as protecting the Nation's airports or enforcing border security. ATF's explosives detection canines program supports multiple missions and works in an impressive variety of venues: from scouring bomb scenes to assisting in search warrant executions; and supporting State and local law enforcement with canine teams for major sporting events. ATF is also able to deploy large numbers of canines, when requested, to National Special Security Events and other major gatherings, such as the G-8 Conference, Presidential inaugurations, Super Bowls, and the World Series. ATF canines, of course, also

support ATF's mission in enforcing criminal statutes combating explosives and firearms violence. From January 2000 to December 2003, there were nearly 3,000 bombings in the United States, with 334 injuries, 51 deaths, and nearly $27 million in damage. Many times ATF explosives detection canines or accelerant canine detection of evidence in explosives, firearms, or arson investigations has contributed to successful prosecutions. These canines are stationed throughout the United States in ATF offices, local police department and bomb squads, other Federal agencies, and foreign government agencies. Since the beginning of FY 2004, ATF canine teams have handled over 800 deployments domestically and internationally to prevent or investigate terrorism and violent crimes, including providing assistance to the Iraqi Police Service and the U.S. military in Iraq. ATF explosives detection canines are providing support to other U.S. government agencies in Iraq to protect American lives and property.

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In supporting the Department of Justice in its goal of combating terrorism, ATF canines have played a significant role. While deployed on missions, ATF canine teams have recovered improvised explosive devices, explosives materials, post-blast evidence, firearms, shell casings, and ammunition. ATF canine teams have made recoveries and contributed to recent high profile cases such as the Washington, DC, area sniper investigations, when an ATF canine team was instrumental in finding shell casings.

With the increased levels of security in the United States since September 11, 2001, the country has seen a dramatic increase in the number of explosives detection canines being used by law enforcement and private companies. A common question is whether there is a need for national standards for explosives detection canines. In 1996, Congress directed ATF, through the Treasury Secretary, to develop national odor recognition standards for explosives detection canines. ATF set interim standards in 1997, and has been working with various organizations since then to more widely implement the standards. With ATF's move to the Department of Justice under the Homeland Security Act, then-Attorney General John Ashcroft issued a memorandum on August 11, 2004, regarding explosives investigation jurisdiction which, among other things, directed that as soon as practicable, all Justice Department components that use explosives detection canines are to use only ATF-certified canines. ATF's National Odor Recognition Testing ("NORT") is a critical aspect of fulfilling the Attorney General's directive.

In response to the growing demand nationwide for explosives detection canines, as well as concerns about the quality of canines being procured by law enforcement agencies from non-governmental sources, ATF is taking steps to provide more assistance to other State, local, and Federal law enforcement agencies. This includes providing training and knowledge to help law enforcement agencies have proficient explosives detection canines and give them the ability to evaluate and rectify shortcoming.

More than 50 percent of all law enforcement canine teams are not associated with a recognized Federal canine training program or certification. There are numerous private vendors selling explosives detection canines that have trained those dogs according to a variety of inconsistent standards and under various conditions. In fact, there is no consistent definition as to what even constitutes an explosives detection canine. Because of this lack of consistency, and for safety reasons, the National Bomb Squad Commanders Advisory Board has stated that they would like every explosives detection canines working in conjunction with a bomb squad in the United States to have passed a standard certification. ATF is in a unique position to address this public safety issue. The formal implementation of ATF's NORT, backed by hard science in the form of chemistry and administered by experienced trainers, will greatly enhance public safety as well as help validate the capabilities of explosives detection canines being used nationally and internationally as anti-terrorist tools. Informal testing began earlier this year with the use of non-ATF trained explosives detection canines in order to assess how they would perform. These initial tests were promising, and as a result, additional EDCs were tested. Based on these results, ATF offered a successful pilot NORT at our Canine Training Center on September 20, 2005, with further testing scheduled in the future.

The NORT will be of tremendous benefit to Federal, State, local, tribal, and foreign explosives canine programs that choose to participate. The NORT initiative will allow for the continued enhancement of explosives investigation expertise within the law enforcement community. Additionally, NORT will both develop and nurture

collaborative partnerships through training with other agencies, all of whom are, in one form or another, responsible for protecting the public against the threat of violent crime and terrorism. This is truly government at its best.

Finally, ATF continues to combat terrorism and ensure public safety by supporting the efforts of other agencies that currently lack ATF-trained canines but utilize explosives detection canines. During this past year ATF has offered and delivered training to non-ATF trained canines, by holding seminars and training sessions during meetings of the International Association of Bomb Technicians and Investigators (including training on dangerous peroxide explosives). In August of 2005, ATF hosted a training day for Washington, D.C., area canines for the purpose of exposing the teams to peroxide explosives. As we speak, ATF is delivering peroxide explosives training to canine teams in New York City and will conduct the same training next week for the United States Capitol Police. We have also scheduled explosives safety training in FY 2006 for canine teams to expose them to a wide array of live explosives, explosive products, and detonators. We also will cover safe handling of explosives, improving the human side of the equation and increasing public safety in the process.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I would be happy to answer any questions you have.